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A

POETICAL EPISTLE

To ●●●● ●●●●●●●, M. A.

STUDENT OF CHRIST-CHURCH.

By Mr. *WODHULL.*

Muſe,
Un Uſage inconſtant t' entraine,
Et la Raiſon toujours certaine
Ne t'a point marqué tes Sentiers?
Mais, non, je ne veux point le croire;
Ce Reproche offenſe ta Gloire;
Et fletiroit tous nos Lauriers. LA MOTTE.

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MDCCLXII.

POETICAL EPISTLE

TO [illegible] M.A.

STUDENT OF CHRIST-CHURCH.

BY Mr. MODDRUTA.

BRITISH MUSEUM

EPISTLE

To **** *******, M. A.

ON Thames's Banks, while you with happier Care,
In bolder Notes invite th' Aonian Fair;
Or nobly point, to guide the riſing Youth
The ſteep Aſcent which Scales the Hill of Truth,
With Learning pure Morality impart,
Strengthen the Head, and humanize the Heart;
Shall fond Preſumption daringly intrude
To grate your poliſh'd Ear with Accents rude?

Since you, ſome Leiſure Moments to beguile,
Regard my Idleneſſes with a Smile;

No ſervile Cuſtom's narrow Laws revere,
Pleas'd with the Language of a Tongue ſincere,
Accept this Preſent like a partial Friend:
Elſe the raſh Trifle juſtly might offend.

If e'er my Boſom caught the ſacred Flame,
Let me remember from what Source it came:
Your Counſel bade me tread this arduous Way,
And deign'd to form the rough miſhapen Lay.

Here will I trace where firſt theſe Strains began,
Ere fleeting Childhood ripen'd into Man.
Can I forget, while Memory holds her Reign,
And ſummons forth her bright ideal Train,
Beneath what †-Auſpices my earlier Age
Imbib'd the Dictates of the Good and Sage?
No gentle Ouse! for oft I lov'd to ſtray
Where thy ſmooth Current winds its ſedgy Way:

† At the Reverend Mr. *******'s, Father of the Gentleman to whom this Epiſtle is addreſſed.

Full

Full to my View beſide thy conſcious Stream
Coy Science thence diſclos'd her kindling Beam;
In wild Career ſpontaneous Numbers flow'd,
As with a Heat unfelt before I glow'd.
If, aught of Glory, Verſe like mine can give,
Thy Name recorded by the Muſe ſhall live,
To me far dearer than the boaſted Groves
Of proud LYCEUM, where ILISSUS roves:
Though not a Wreath adorn thy modeſt Urn,
In thy neglected Meads no Poet burn,
No Lover carve thy Praiſe on every Tree
With his CALISTA fondly joining thee.

SINCE Glory prompted, and I turn'd my Eyes
To where the Hills of ſteep PARNASSUS riſe;
Since ſketch'd by Hope the flattering Landſchape grew,
Ere Judgment check'd the Strokes which Fancy drew.
Blindly I ventur'd on a feeble Wing,
Struck the harſh Lyre, and tun'd th' unmeaning String.

But

But when faint glimmering o'er the mighty Theme
The Lamp of Genius vaniſh'd like a Dream,
In Wiſdom's loftier Spheres too weak to riſe,
Where wrapt in Clouds abſtruſer Science lies;
Unſkilful in the Jargon of the Schools,
And little vers'd in mathematic Rules,
With ardent Curioſity I ſought
What modern Art, what antient Nature taught;
Saw Poetry expand a leafy Shoot
To hide its ſapleſs Trunk, and waſted Root;
Obſerv'd Caprice exalt her light Abode,
And mark'd the Sallies of the reigning Mode.

Some will object; "ſuch Theme is quite miſplac'd.
"Hence Madman! what haſt thou to do with Taſte?
"Shall uncommiſſion'd Impudence decide
"On Airs and Operas with a Scribbler's Pride;
"And dare to mix with Coxcombs not a few
"Who talk of Matters, which they never knew?"

Becauſe

Becauſe forſooth I flaunt not in Brocade
To the Ridotto, Court, or Maſquerade;
But hear unmov'd imperious Faſhion's Call,
And bring no Surfeit from the midnight Ball,
Nor the ſlow, tedious, weighty Hours to kill
All Day read HOYLE, all Nght attend Quadrille;
They treat my Notions as th' abſurd Pretence
Of one quite loſt to Taſte and common Senſe.

" AVAUNT ye Witlings," the grave Pedant cries;
" Or pay juſt Def'rence to the Learn'd and Wiſe.
" Whoe'er would judge aright of Books, of Men,
" And deal Inſtruction with unerring Pen,
" Before he hopes to win the gazing Crowd
" And to the World proclaim his Thoughts aloud:
" Let him, in bulky Volumes deeply read
" Drink genuine Knowledge from the Fountain-Head."

As one bewilder'd in profoundeſt Night,
Who faintly kens ſome Vapor's *dancing Light*,

At Random led: perplex'd by each Remark
We're left as much as ever in the Dark,
When Commentators ſolve the knotty Point,
And twiſt conteſted Adverbs out of Joint.

Perhaps you'll anſwer, "that to clear the Doubt
"'Tis beſt to ſearch a ſtated Medium out;
"Nor Fops, nor Book-Worms for our Judges call:
"Theſe think too much; they never think at all.

Then let us ſee---in Ages ſo polite
Who's qualified to read, and who to write?
Say ſhall we (like the Game-Act) fix a Rate
By Privilege annex'd to ſuch Eſtate;
Extol the fine-ſpun Verſe his Lordſhip weaves,
And in Divinity adore Lawn-Sleeves?

Or ſhall we boldly level ev'ry Mound
Admitting all to tread *poetic Ground*;

And with a patriot Spirit for our Guide
Extend the Limits of PARNASSUS wide,
Allowing thoſe, who never yet could ſpell,
To ſpeak, praiſe, cenſure, nay, to write as well?

WHETHER we viſit, dreſs, or entertain,
Cuſtom deſpotic reigns; ---- and let her reign.
But ſhall the Muſes learn the Gait, the Dance,
With all the tawdry Nothingneſs of FRANCE;
Muſt they aſſume ſome new fantaſtic Shape,
And change their Habit with each modiſh Ape?
Shall *He* in literary Credit ſhine
Whoſe looſe *Adventures* ſwells the *Novel* Line?
And ſhall the Man of Judgment's Tongue be mute,
Unleſs inur'd to quibble, and diſpute?

WHOE'ER would boaſt a nice Diſcerner's Art
Should feel with tender ſympathyzing Heart;
Not by the Teſt of cold proſaic Laws
Defraud Invention of its juſt Applauſe:

But where bold Nature's mimic Dreſs appears
Tranſported ſhudder at fictitious Fears;
Now pale with Grief, and now with Joy elate
Bleed with the Vanquiſh'd, triumph with the Great,
By each humane, heroic Paſſion toſt,
And ſink amid the dear Illuſion loſt.
This, this is he, whoſe vig'rous Soul can climb
Up with the Poet to the true Sublime;
Without LONGINUS Aid his Soul it warms.
He wants no * B**** to tell why Beauty charms.

THUS the great STAGYRITE who taught the Road
Thro' Learning's Paths to Glory's high Abode,
Himſelf before, with animated Skill
Dipp'd in CATALIAN Streams his glowing Quill,
Nor by dim cloiſter'd Obſervation ſaw:
But, ere enacted, he perform'd the Law;
To Virtue's Altar his bold Pæans reach,
And emulate the Art, he ſtrove to teach:

* The ingenious Author of "A Philoſophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime, and Beautiful."

His

His Tribute firſt the ſmiling Muſe approv'd,
Then gave her Sceptre to the Son ſhe lov'd.

Fashion, who Arbiter of earthly Things
Dignifies Beggars, or depoſes Kings,
At length ordains, (which none muſt diſallow)
That what was Reaſon once, is Folly now.

See Criticiſm advance, inſpiring Awe;
She ſtalks triumphant, like ſome grand Baſhaw:
With, or without a Cauſe, from Syſtems free
Alters, confirms, reverſes her Decree;
Her thund'ring Faſces brandiſhes anew
Guiding her own dear Critical Review.
Faſt by her Car in Iron Shackles bound
Reluctant Genius kneels, and licks the Ground.

Think not I dare in theſe eſtabliſh'd Times
Combat Dominion with preſumptuous Rhimes,

And

And ſceptically blind diſpute the Chair
With thoſe, who ſit like ARISTARCHUS there.
Leſs ſanguine Thoughts my ſober Wiſhes bound,
To tread ſecure, nor meet the threaten'd Wound:
For this once more my trembling Pen I draw,
And hail all Critics with reſpectful Awe.

MY lifted Mirror haſtens to diſplay
The modern Poet iſſuing to the Day:
I aſk not, whom; what Theme his Genius fires;
How ſweet the Strains his fav'rite Muſe inſpires;
Whether he pace on ſtrait-curb'd claſſic Steed,
Or mount the winged PEGASEAN Breed?
I would not tear him with a VANDAL's Hate;
Nor yet, regarding his prepoſt'rous Fate,
Pity his Woes, and curſe his ruling Star;
But coolly mention Matters as they are.

PRIVATELY cramm'd with more than friendly Praiſe,
Shower'd to feed his ever-thirſting Lays;

Hot

Hot with Impatience, which his Looks confeſs,
The Youth commits his Writings to the Preſs:
On Dryden's ſounding Pinions ſee him riſe,
Or range with Milton in ideal Skies;
Eager he pants to reach the laurel Crown,
Anticipating Years of long Renown.

Full ſoon he views the airy Fiction paſt,
For ſuch Deliriums were not made to laſt.
Ere yet too late miſtaken Bard retire,
Ceaſe thy vain Dreams, nor fan the hopeleſs Fire.
Or if thy patient Muſe muſt needs deſign
To heap with Incenſe Glory's crowded Shrine,
An Ordeal more ſevere than that of Old
Expect: --- nay ſhrink not; --- but approach, behold!
See Apes of Taſte with half-ſpawn'd Wits combine,
Weigh Word by Word, and murder Line by Line;
Here pining Envy frets; there Malice ſtorms,
And Dulneſs riſes in her thouſand Forms.

To ſcape the Tempeſt's Rage we look around,
Rejoic'd if but a Hovel can be found.
A Man no cowardly Poltroon I hold
Who rapt in Flannel ſhuns NORWEGIAN Cold.
Then let us, as calm Prudence bids, obey,
And by her Guidance take the ſurer Way:
For ſince nor Heav'n-taught Genius can avail,
Nor Dint of Study turn the loaded Scale;
How ſhall a puny Rhimer dare withſtand
Incens'd Stupidity's united Band?

'TWAS thus departing Freedom at the Field
Of loſt PHILIPPI ſaw her Squadrons yield,
When civil Enmity her Banners tore,
And BRUTUS ſhed the laſt of ROMAN Gore;
With either Party Atticus allied
Bow'd to the Triumphs of OCTAVIUS' Pride;
Formally wept at Freedom's cloſing Grave,
Then hugg'd his Fetters like an abject Slave.

My Verſe to thee ſubmiſſive I reſign;
Yes, mighty Dulneſs, I am wholly thine:
O! teach me how to gain, --- not merit, Praiſe,
And give, O give thy ſoporific Bays;
Bind me a willing Captive in thy Chains,
And lead me, where Alliteration reigns:
Hard by thy Throne ſhe waves her wond'rous Wand,
Wafting her balmy Bleſſings o'er the Land,
Where warbling winds the pure pellucid Rill,
And ſoothing Sounds excluded Meaning kill.

Sick of this Homage I depart in Haſte,
The labour'd Sameneſs palls my jaded Taſte.
Fretful I mutter "this is far too much ---
"I hate e'en Honour ſhould the Terms be ſuch.
"To me ſome leſs mechanic Taſk aſſign;
"Conſent, O Goddeſs, and the Prize is mine."

Here the proud Queen's ſagacious Train exclaim;
"Inſtantly ſnatch the Palms of proffer'd *Fame*;

" So ſhall thy Judges with complacent Smile
" Approve thy neat, thy terſe, thy claſſic Stile.
" As Faſhion dictates, and our Laws ordain
" In lulling Accents tune thy *horned* Strain;
" With fixed Anchor in the Haven keep,
" Nor raſhly venture on the ſtormy Deep.

" The Naids firſt addreſs, and faunt'ring dream
" By the green Margin of ſome cryſtal Stream;
" To ſweet Arcadia's bliſsful Shades aſpire
" In gentle Sydney's *Shepherdiſh* Attire.

" Thy ſecond Theme, ſome Amarillis chuſe
" Whoſe Charms may animate thy ſluggiſh Muſe,
" Let Hammond's Number touch the feeling Heart:
" Be thou ſuperior; add the Garb of Art,
" In lofty Diction bid her amply ſhine,
" Beauteous, Angelic,---ſtop not there,---Divine:
" Say in her Cheeks what ambuſh'd Jav'lins lie;
" What Radiance beaming from her *ſun-clad* Eye."

This

This is but trifling.--- "Would'ſt thou then ſucceed;
"Fear not, be bold; ſelect a Theme indeed.
"Say, can thy ſoft inſinuating Skill
"Deſcribe a Stateſman's Probity at Will;
"With fervent Zeal aſſiduous to commend
"Th' illuſtrious Patron, and the generous Friend,
"To Wealth, to Title duteous Homage pay,
"And make the Great the Subject of thy Lay?

"Applause from echoing Multitudes to gain,
Or canſt thou ------?"

Almost burſting with Diſdain,
"Indeed I cannot," I enrag'd reply;
"Let others handle Themes like theſe---not I."

Then what Aſylum yet remains for me,
Where Candor rules, and Poetry is free?
Say ſhall I ſteer to reach yon fated Land,
Where frequent Wrecks deform the hoſtile Strand,

Where Dunce promiſcuous rival Dunce engages,
And Mud with Mud eternal Battle wages;

Or ſhall I fly, where noiſy Tumults ceaſe,
And ſeek the Dwellings of inglorious Peace,
Lock'd in the Bonds of happy Slumber faſt,
To doze away Remembrance of the paſt;
Forgetful too that e'er my childiſh Tongue
With raviſh'd Wonder liſp'd th' imperfect Song;
Content domeſtic Quiet to purſue,
And bid that falſe Coquette the Muſe, adieu?

Since Caution ſlumber'd when this rhyming Will
Firſt bade me ſtain with Ink my haſty Quill;
Let her depart, and viſit thoſe who fear
The Critic's Laſh, the Wit's contemptuous Sneer,
I cannot now ſuperlatively wiſe
Perform what * Epictetus would adviſe,

* Ανικητος ειναι δυνασαι, εαν εις μηδενα αγωνα καταβαινης, ον μη εστιν επι σοι νικησαι. Enchiridion. Cap. 25.

" Letting

" Letting each dang'rous Enterprize alone
" Call unſubdued Security thy own."
Unfurl'd the Banner, and the Weapon caſt,
All Hopes of Safety in Retreat are paſt.

SHOULD I ſtand forth on Record as a Fool,
My Maxims ſpurn'd, and cancell'd ev'ry Rule,
I will not yet implicitly abide
By what the People happen to decide.
Nor can I for my Life attentive ſit
To praiſe each Species of new-fangled Wit;
Or dwell with Tranſport on the hobbling Rhimes,
The claſſic Cant of theſe poetic Times.

FAR be the odious Antiquary's Frown
Who aims to pull all living Merit down,
Who churliſhly belies the preſent Days,
When he bewails with an invidious Praiſe,
(To give Detraction's Venom freer Scope)
All Genius buried in the Grave of POPE.

But ſhall each Muſhroom-Being of a Day
Uſurp an inſolent oppreſſive Sway;
Inhuman Plunderers by Rapine fed,
Rake up the Aſhes of the mighty Dead,
And conjure forth ſome vet'ran Poet, dreſt
(Superfluous Toil) in Faſhion's gorgeous Veſt.

Tir'd of the Crowds, and Noiſe of Lombard Street,
Thus when the Cit obtains a Country Seat;
Where in uncircumſcrib'd Extent was drawn
Magnificently large the various Lawn,
He bounds to meaſur'd Space the formal Square,
Or gives Proportion to th' exact Parterre;
Wonderful Induſtry! in Pipes convey'd
Here ſputters down the regular Caſcade,
There, draggled on in Beauty's vaunted Line,
Behold the muddy Trench --- a Serpentine.

Tell me no more how Shakespear's Lines expreſs
Th' inimitable Feelings of Diſtreſs.

When

When Romeo haſtes to ſleeping Juliet's Tomb,
Or injur'd Lear bewails his wretched Doom?
Where are thoſe tragic Scenes renown'd of old,
In native Strength irregularly bold;
Thoſe genuine Tints with which that Maſter drew
Expreſſive Nature to our dazzled View?
All, all are vaniſh'd. He whoſe ample Mind
No rigid Learning's ſlaviſh Rules confin'd,
O'er trackleſs Regions wont at large to ſoar:
Now cramp'd in Trammels of *Theatric Lore*,
His Seat uſurp'd by more than Gothic Luſt,
Shorn of his Plumes lies groveling in the Duſt.

Privy to Juliet's counterfeited Death,
We wait the Hour, that ſhall reſtore her Breath;
With Hope, with Fear, with fond Impatience burn,
'Till abſent Romeo ſpeed his wiſh'd Return:
Here muſt we ſtop;---and while in due Array
The ſtale Proceſſion ſweeps the tedious Way,

Conſpiring

Conſpiring Shouts of thronging Galleries join;
" Indeed this SHAKESPEAR is prodigious fine!"
SEE frantic LEAR in hopeleſs Grief diſtreſt,
And warm Compaſſion melt each generous Breaſt:
Now haſtes th' unravell'd Drama to its Cloſe,
And Death breaks off the Tenor of his Woes.
Can we behold without indignant Rage
The Monarch re-enthron'd upon the Stage;
And SHAKESPEAR's Plan revers'd to bid him live?
Such is the Crown our wiſe *Corrections* give.
A juſter Title ſhall the Muſe beſtow
On theſe Deſtroyers of the Tragic Woe:
Whoe'er the Author of ſo black a Deed,
In her auguſt Tribunal 'tis decreed
To judge his Cruelty more hateful ſtill
Than the barbarian Wiles of GONERILL.

WHILE many a Wretch who bears the Poet's Name,
Deaf to the Voice of Reaſon, and of Fame,

Meerly

Meerly to furbiſh out ſome paultry Scene,
New patches OTWAY with deform'd RACINE,
Beſmears with foreign Sauce coarſe ENGLISH Ware,
Or like a Ruffian pillages VOLTAIRE;
The heav'nly Muſe alone unpinion'd ſings,
Nor ſtoops to theſe imaginary Kings;
She opens honeſt Truth's obſtructed Source,
Points Satire's Edge, and wings her Javelin's Force.

SOME think, " on Inſects cruſh'd without a Foe,
" That Juſtice idly hurls her weighty Blow.
" So ſhort, ſo fleeting their allotted Date,
" Why urge a Playwright's neceſſary Fate?
" O'er *their* high Creſt Oblivion ſpreads her Rod,
" Soon are the Footſteps vaniſh'd where they trod,
" They and their Farces mixing with the Wind,
" All diſappear, nor leave a Wreck behind,
" Where plung'd in Chaos many a Fathom deep
" Myriads of Frenchified Abortions ſleep.

YET if theſe Plagiaries exalted high
On borrow'd Fame's weak Pedeſtals rely;
Wherefore on Mortals deſperately brave
Laviſh that Mercy which they never gave?
When Crops ſo rank, exub'rant Dulneſs yields,
Who weilds the Critic's Falchion nobly weilds.

DESIGNS like theſe my Pencil rudely plan'd,
The Execution aſks an abler Hand.
Enough for me, if in theſe nameleſs Shades,
Far from the Manſions of AONIA's Maids,
Ingenuous Truth her artleſs Charms diſplay,
And ſteady Reaſon guide the temper'd Lay:
Or ſhewn by ſtrong Imagination's Light
Ages far diſtant crowd the mental Sight,
When ROUSSEAU tells the *happy State of Man
By Prieſtcraft forg'd ere Right Divine began;
Ere Tyrants claim'd the ſovereign Throne of God,
And cruſh'd the Nations with an Iron Rod.

* Diſcours ſur l'Origine & les Fondemens de l'Inegalité par les Hommes.

THUS

THUS unobſerv'd by mad Ambition's Gaze,
'Tis mine to rove thro' Fortune's humbler Maze,
Aſſert the Freedom of the dauntleſs Muſe,
And read, or write ſuch Whimſies as I chuſe.

******* may you with more ſucceſsful Aim
Approach the Temple of wide-echoing Fame,
And cull the Wreaths, where pleaſing Fiction glows
In fairy Realms, which liberal Genius ſtrews;
Whoſe darted Impulſe ſpringing thro' the Mind,
Leaves ſlowly plodding Induſtry behind.

F I N I S.